

Summary of SWAT General Meeting, December 2, 2011, Skokomish Grange Hall

Attendees:

Jason Ragan, Skokomish Grange and Taylor Shellfish Farms
Sara Crumb, Congressman Norm Dicks' Office
Pete Modaff, Congressman Norm Dicks Office
Rich Geiger, Mason Conservation District
Keith Dublanica, Governor's Salmon Office
Patti Case, Green Diamond Resource Company
Rebecca Wolfe, Sierra Club
Shelley Spalding, Olympic Forest Coalition
Mike Anderson, The Wilderness Society
Tim Davis, Forest Service, ONF
Robin Shoal, Forest Service, ONF
Dale Hom, Forest Service, ONF
Sharon Yeh, Forest Service, ONF
Dean Yoshina, Forest Service, Hood Canal Ranger District
Robin Stoddard, Forest Service, ONF
Karen Ragan, valley resident
Dave and Patti Rose, valley residents
Debbie Brown, valley resident
Wesley Johnson, valley resident
Jayni Kamin, SWAT
Marlies Wierenga, Wildlands CPR
Gerald Ford, Fire District 9
Rich Carlson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Jessie Winkler, Army Corps of Engineers
Pat Cagney, Army Corps of Engineers
Rachel Merko, Army Corps of Engineers
CJ Klocow, Army Corps of Engineers
Alann and Mali Krivor, Skokomish Farms, Inc.
Mike and Lois Brisbin, Lake Cushman residents
Jason Bausher
Jim Hunter, valley resident
Paul Hickey, Tacoma Power
Alex Gouley, Skokomish Tribe
Ron Figlar-Barnes, Skokomish Tribe
Tiffany Royal, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
Marty Best, Mason County Emergency Management
Allen Gibbs, Pilchuck Audubon

Total: 40

Mike Anderson thanked the Skokomish Grange for hosting the meeting, Jason and Karen Ragan for setting up the room, Patti Case and Rebecca Wolfe for preparing lunch, and Ron Gold for providing ice cream.

Skokomish River Gauges

Marty Best said that the county is working with the U.S. Geological Survey, National Weather Service, and River Forecast Center to improve river monitoring and flood forecasting so people will know when they need to take action. Currently gauges are located at Cushman dams, on the north and south forks, and at Highway 101. When the river overtops its banks or a levee breaks, the gauges often underestimate the impacts. To address this problem, they are moving to a “synthetic staging” system by collecting additional data on water depths along the road and comparing that with the river gage data. The goal is to give residents 2-3 hours more advance warning of floods. Marty also said that the Nalley Dike and Purdy Creek Bridge projects appear to be reducing flood depths and duration in the valley. He will plan to attend the January Grange meeting to discuss the new gauging system.

Rich Geiger said that it would be important to add a gauge on Vance Creek, which sometimes produces more water than the South Fork. This would benefit both safety for upper valley residents and monitoring of future projects stemming from the General Investigation. He suggested that SWAT should work together to raise funds for such a gauge. Marty said that the county probably could not afford that, since the Skokomish already has all of the gauges in the county.

Upper Watershed - South Fork

Robin Stoddard reported that the Forest Service completed 13.3 miles of road decommissioning or closure in 2011 and that another 5.2 miles were under contract. Also, Dusty Watz completed storm damage risk reduction work on priority sites along 60 miles of roads. The Forest Service conducted photo monitoring for several of the road projects implemented this year. The Legacy Roads and Trails program provided \$700,000 for Skokomish road projects this year, compared to \$2 million last year. Other notable accomplishments this year included:

- 100 acres of helicopter logging (completing the Flat Stewardship Project) generated enough receipts to fund 17 acres of precommercial thinning.
- The Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) and other contractors planted trees on 22 miles of roads that were decommissioned in 2010.
- Planting of river banks occurred in the South Fork Large Wood Project area. The Corps of Engineers and other agencies will begin monitoring the South Fork engineered logjams starting in January.
- WCC completed underplanting within forest stands that were the tree source for the South Fork Large Wood Project, utilizing 1,700 conifer seedlings. They also planted 450 willow and red osier dogwood rooted cuttings in forest stands to enhance elk forage habitat.
- Invasive weeds treatments were completed on roads that have been or will be decommissioned. The Backcountry Horsemen of Washington also packed in supplies to eradicate weeds near Pine Lake.

Shelley Spalding said that, with the help of ten new volunteers, Olympic Forest Coalition and Great Old Broads for Wilderness were able to complete monitoring surveys on two miles of road-to-trail conversions, two miles of proposed road decommissioning, and two miles of temporary haul roads.

Rebecca Wolfe asked about the job impacts of all the road remediation work taking place. Robin said it was hard to estimate multiplier effects, but there were seven crews working this year, with two to six people per crew. A Region 6 accomplishment report estimated that 58-86 jobs were produced in the South Fork Skokomish due to Legacy Roads and Trails work in 2010.

Patti Case said that Green Diamond has a project to reduce storm damage risk on the 8000 Road and is finding that such projects are saving considerable of time and effort, such as needing to do less storm patrol. Karen Ragan said that she and others appreciate the paving of the 23 Road.

Dean Yoshina gave the SWAT credit for much of the restoration funding in the upper watershed. Currently the Forest Service is preparing two stewardship projects: Ahl Over near the High Steel Bridge and Upper South Fork. Each project will involve about 800 acres of thinning, which will generate receipts for restoration projects. A SWAT subcommittee will meet with the Forest Service later in December to help identify projects to fund. The Upper South Fork environmental assessment should be completed this spring and the timber sale is scheduled for summer 2013. Ahl Over will follow soon after.

Robin Shoal described a new Prairie Restoration project, covering 32 acres in the High Steel/Lake West area. The project will involve thinning and burning the area to restore beargrass savannah and open woodland conditions that existed historically. Native Americans regularly burned the area for camas, deer hunting, and beargrass for basket making. The Forest Service plans to complete some of the burning this summer. This would be a potential SWAT field trip.

James Heyl Memorial

Robin Stoddard gave a slide presentation of photos taken by James Heyl, who died of a heart attack on October 17 while doing road surveys in the South Fork watershed with Robin. Since 2009, James walked about 56 miles of roads in the South Fork watershed, helping with survey and design for \$4.7 million of Legacy Roads and Trails work. Robin was alone with James at the time of his death and administered CPR for more than an hour while waiting for help to arrive. Robin read a SWAT letter of appreciation to James' widow and family.

Upper Watershed – North Fork

Paul Hickey reviewed the recent history of the Cushman settlement, which was agreed to in January 2009 by the City of Tacoma, Skokomish Tribe, and various government agencies. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approved the settlement and issued a 40-year operating license for the Cushman hydro-project in July 2010. The FERC denied an appeal of the licensing decision this summer, allowing implementation of the settlement agreement with the Skokomish Tribe to proceed. On September 9, the Tribe and Tacoma held a ceremony at Lake Cushman to sign deeds transferring three land parcels from the City to the Tribe: Lake Cushman Park, Saltwater Park, and Nalley Ranch. Paul showed a video of the ceremony, at which Joseph Pavel spoke eloquently about the many partners who are working together toward a common vision for the Skokomish watershed.

Pursuant to the settlement, Tacoma has begun building a new powerhouse and adult fish collection facility at the base of Dam 2. Fish will be sorted at a facility adjacent to the top of Dam 2, and either released or taken to one of two hatcheries. One hatchery will raise coho, spring Chinook, and steelhead, while a second hatchery at Saltwater Park will be for sockeye salmon. Coho and steelhead are already in the river system, but sockeye and spring Chinook will need to be brought from elsewhere. Baker Lake is a potential source for the sockeye. The Tribe and WA Department of Fish and Wildlife are co-managers of the fisheries resource. Tacoma and its resource agency partner members of the Cushman Fisheries and Habitat Committee are studying whether bull trout populations in the upper and lower watersheds are genetically distinct. Under the current time schedule, the adult collection facility will be completed in October 2012, hatcheries will be completed in 2014, and juvenile fish collection will begin in 2015. Fish stocking will continue in the lakes – 100,000 rainbow trout were stocked in Lake Kokanee this year. WDFW has discontinued stocking kokanee in Lake Cushman in anticipation of reintroducing sockeye. Tacoma Power now has a webpage with information about the Cushman settlement at <http://www.mytpu.org/tacomapower/power-system/hydro-power/licensing/cushman-hydro-project/Default.htm>.

Water Quality Monitoring

Ron Figlar-Barnes, the Tribe's EPA Environmental Coordinator, discussed water quality monitoring trends in the Skokomish River and valley. Pollution from the Skokomish River during flood events frequently requires closure of shellfish harvesting in Annas Bay. Last year the bay was closed 8 times for 108 days total. Starting in 2001, the Tribe has monitored fecal coliform, nitrates, phosphates, dissolved oxygen, pH, and temperature at 21 water quality monitoring sites. Water quality issues in the Skokomish River have the potential to contribute to low dissolved oxygen levels and fish kills in Hood Canal. Fecal coliform pollution declined significantly from 2001 to 2006, but has increased slightly since then in at the 106 Bridge. Consistently, Weaver Creek, 10-Acre Creek, and Purdy Creek have high fecal coliform. When polluted water from the river enters the estuary, the salinity kills fecal coliform indicators but not the pathogens, which are especially numerous in animal waste.

The Tribe is interested in applying for an EPA grant to reduce non-point source pollution, such as from livestock, and would welcome valley landowner participation. Grant applications are due in January.

Estuary Restoration

Alex Gouley gave a presentation on the status of on-going restoration efforts in the Skokomish Estuary. This has been a great collaboration with the City of Tacoma, Mason Conservation District, and the Tribe. Tribal objectives include improved production of shellfish and sweetgrass (for basket-making) as well as salmon habitat. Phases I and II were completed in 2007 and 2010, respectively, and Phase III is planned for 2012. Phases I and II restored 338 acres of salt marsh, removed 4.8 miles of exterior dikes, and reintroduced tidal riverine hydrology. Phase III work will include installing and replacing road culverts to connect forested and saltwater marsh areas.

Congressional Update

Pete Modaff said that Congressman Dicks remains very committed to restoring the Skokomish watershed. Congress is finishing up the appropriations bills for 2012. The Energy and Water bill will fund the Corps of Engineers' General Investigation, and the Interior and Environment bill will fund Legacy Road and Trails projects. It is important that the Skokomish G.I. be included in the President's budget request. A SWAT letter of support -- addressed to the Asst. Sec. of Army for Public Works and copied to the appropriations subcommittees -- could be helpful. In addition, Dicks and Senator Murray are holding four public workshops this month on their Wild Olympics proposal, which includes wilderness and wild and scenic river designations in the Skokomish watershed.

General Investigation

Jessica Winkler and Pat Cagney from the Army Corps of Engineers gave a presentation on the Skokomish River Basin General Investigation Study. The Corps has nearly completed its analysis of existing and future conditions, preliminary identification of potential projects, and documentation required for the Feasibility Scoping Meeting at Corps headquarters this spring. The Corps looked at an option of reducing flood risk by dredging nine miles of the river and concluded that it was not economically feasible, sustainable, or effective beyond a 2-year flood event. So the Corps intends to focus the G.I. on aquatic ecosystem restoration actions, which may also offer some flood risk management benefits.

The presentation listed about 30 potential restoration projects within five reaches (sections) of the river. Projects included widening the Hwy. 106 and 101 bridges, reconnecting side channels on Hunter and Weaver creeks, building a causeway over Vance Creek, trapping sediment, selective dredging, etc. Assuming adequate funding, the current schedule calls for formulating alternatives starting in January 2012, identifying a recommended plan in October 2012, completing feasibility designs in February 2013, and submitting a draft feasibility report and EIS in August 2013.

SWAT Action Plan Update

Mike said that a subcommittee consisting of Alex, Robin, Rich, Richard Brocksmith, Patti Case, and himself has begun updating the SWAT 3-year action. The update will begin with a progress report on the original action plan, which was written in 2007. Most of the projects in the 2007 action plan have been completed -- for example, about 70 percent of all the Forest Service's high-priority road remediation work has now been accomplished.

The updated action plan will likely be divided into four geographic sections: South Fork/Vance Creek, North Fork/Cushman, middle valley, and estuary. The South Fork/Vance Creek section will be based on the forthcoming watershed action plans for the Upper and Middle South Fork sixth field watersheds that the Forest Service is developing pursuant to its Watershed Condition Framework. The North Fork/Cushman section will be based on the Cushman settlement. The remaining sections will be informed by the preliminary projects identified in the General Investigation.